

SUCCESS STORY Innovation Is In Our Nature

PIERCE COUNTY RESIDENTS, NATIONAL NIGHT OUT EVENT SAVES TACOMA NEIGHBORHOOD

Tacoma's Pacific Avenue had become a magnet for drug dealers and prostitution. Widespread graffiti and litter created an atmosphere of neglect, and store owners watched helplessly as intimidated shoppers visited less and less. Lola Brown and Virginia Castro recognized a need for change and it all started with Safe Street's "National Night Out" party.

How did Commerce and Safe St. help solve the problem?

The movement to revitalize Pacific Avenue started at a Safe Streets National Night Out party. When Lola Brown expressed a desire to clean up the busy thoroughfare, she found a willing partner in Virginia Castro. Lola Brown and Virginia Castro hit it off immediately, sharing a mutual desire to clean up the busy thoroughfare.

Knowing that a transformation would require an organized effort, Lola and Virginia visited numerous businesses, and soon found a handful of business owners interested in working with Safe Streets to create a vibrant and dynamic shopping area within a ten-block area of Pacific Avenue, from 46th to 56th Street. The fledgling coalition designated it as the Pacific Avenue Business District, formed for the purpose of bringing new energy to the struggling neighborhood.

From the beginning, the group recognized the value of collaborating with its neighbors. The group sought to bring businesses and the community together. "We decided our main focus was to bring businesses and community together," said member Gerald Gibson. The coalition sponsored a contest for a district logo at a nearby school and organized a festival to show residents the diverse array of shops in their own backyard. One of the biggest undertakings is a beautification campaign. Donations and a South End Neighborhood Council grant written by members funded the installation of 60 large flower planters. The business-community connection is maintained with community cleanups, and a monthly newsletter hand delivered to 600 readers.

Results: The area just celebrated the 4th annual Safety and Community Fair. Each year the fair grows to include more vendors and attract more residents. In 2009, the City of Tacoma crime data (Pierce County Neighborhood Crime web site) reflected an 8% decrease over 2008. In 2010, the City of Tacoma awarded the area official Business District designation. The designation will allow the City of Tacoma to provide additional business coaching and programs to the local businesses. The group keeps a web site updated with valuable information about the neighborhood groups and the businesses; in addition the monthly newsletter is also available online.

The progress made by the Pacific Avenue Business District has helped bring about a major shift in attitude in the neighborhood. The coalition's success has energized residents, brought heart back to business owners, and strengthened members' resolve to continue working together.

Summary: The movement to revitalize Pacific Avenue started at a Safe Streets National Night Out party. When Lola Brown expressed a desire to clean up the busy thoroughfare, she found a willing partner in Virginia Castro.

Pacific Avenue had become a magnet for prostitutes and drug dealers. Widespread graffiti and litter had created fear in the business area. Residents were afraid to shop in the section.



Department of Commerce
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